



LICE AND RHEUMATISM AMONGST SOLDIERS.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—The discomfort and pain caused by vermin and rheumatism to our soldiers are so great that every effort should be made to destroy these pests and relieve rheumatism. In the first edition of my "Pharmacology," published in 1885, I mentioned (p. 1105) five remedies for pediculi—viz., baking clothes to destroy the ova, mercury, anise, pyrethrum, and stavesacre. In the third edition, published in 1893, I added to this list chloroform, cocculus indicus, dalmatian flowers, essential oils, laurel leaves, petroleum, and quassia. The conditions of life on active service make it almost impossible to employ any parasiticide excepting in the form of an ointment. In the *Morning Post* of Jan. 14th there is a recommendation to employ mercurial ointment smeared upon one thick woollen string worn round the neck and another round the waist. This is a very simple method and seems worthy of a trial. In hospital practice the white precipitate ointment of the strength of 1 in 10 for the body and 1 in 5 for the pubis or else stavesacre ointment are more usually employed. Cantani, in his "Farmacologia Clinica," second edition, vol. ii., p. 212, recommends pyrethrum ointment as most efficacious against both forms of lice. It is made by mixing one part of pyrethrum with two of lard. Many essential oils, such as eucalyptus, seem to have a similar beneficial action to anise or pyrethrum. Anise is particularly useful in keeping away fleas, and an easy way of employing it is to carry about on one's person a small muslin bag filled with anise seeds.

In some cases, at least, of rheumatism sulphur is an exceedingly useful anti-rheumatic. Many years ago, with the conceit born of ignorance, I considered the statement that powdered sulphur

worn inside the stocking is a cure for rheumatism to be only an old wives' fable. I learnt my mistake from a case which occurred in my own practice. I was seeing at fairly regular intervals for albuminuria a thoroughly skilled scientific chemist. One day he asked me to prescribe for his wife who was suffering from rheumatic pains in her hands which prevented her from sewing. This was to her a very serious matter as she added much to their joint income by embroidering altar cloths and the like. I gave him a prescription as requested, and at our next interview I asked him how his wife was. "Oh," he said, "she is quite well." I was much pleased at this, and was taking the credit for the cure to myself, when he told me that the medicine I had given her had done her no good at all, but a friend had told her to powder the inside of her stockings with sulphur and wear them all night. In a short time this completely cured her, and her husband said the sulphur must have been absorbed through the skin of her legs, passed through her body, and been excreted by the skin of her arms because her silver bangles became black. This remedy is simple, cheap, and easily applied, and might be useful in the case of our soldiers. I hardly think it could do any harm whatever, though I have no experience of the effect of sulphur continuously applied to the skin for some weeks together, but at any rate I think it is worth a trial.—I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

LAUDER BRUNTON.

New Cavendish-street, W., Feb. 3rd, 1915.